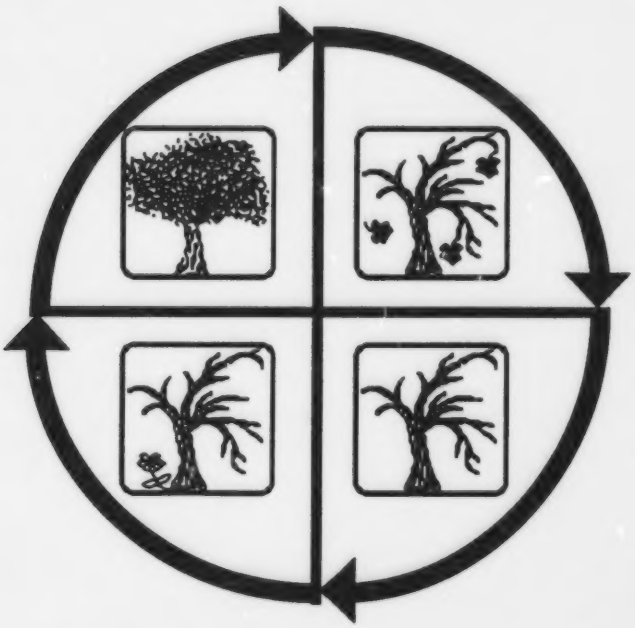
YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION:

SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Revised
May 6, 1991

Alberta
EDUCATION

91-05075/

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YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION FOR ALBERTA
SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is Year-Round Education?

Year round education (YRE) is a method of scheduling in which schools may be used during the entire year or where the vacation periods are more evenly spaced throughout the year. Instead of two months away from school during the summer, classes and vacation periods are scheduled throughout the year. **Students still go to school the same number of days** in each year, between 190 and 200 in Alberta. **Students still follow the same curriculum and are provided with the same educational services** as are provided in our traditional system.

"Year-Round Education is not a new idea. The records of school districts in the U.S. of the early 1900s show programs in a variety of communities, including Newark, New Jersey (1912); Bluffton, Indiana (1904); Aliquippa, Pennsylvania (1928); Nashville, Tennessee (1926); Omaha, Nebraska (1925) and Minot, North Dakota (1917). They were begun for many reasons. Newark did it to help immigrants learn English and to enable students to accelerate; Bluffton did it to improve curriculum and learning, and to provide family and student options; Aliquippa did it for space; Omaha did it to offer continuous vocational training programs; Nashville did it to improve the quality of education; and Minot did it to meet the needs of "laggards," all valid pieces of the puzzle. " (Glines, 1987)

In the United Kingdom, the elementary school calendar has long been arranged so that the vacation periods are spread out throughout the year although students attend school for approximately 200 days as they do in Alberta. There is a five week summer holiday, a week in the Fall, two weeks at Christmas, a week between Christmas and Easter, and two weeks at Easter.

"For various reasons the concept did not survive the depression of the late 1930s in the United States, and the trauma of World War II. The concept was reactivated in 1969 in communities in Missouri, Illinois, California and Minnesota. The more recent resurgence, though up and down like the stock market, is giving indication of becoming a major step toward the projected eventual lifelong 21st Century learning society." (Glines, 1987)

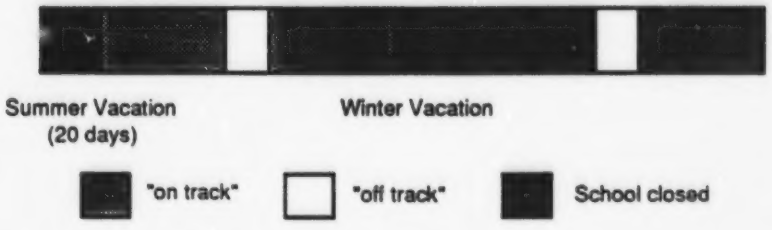
What are examples of typical year-round schedules?

The examples given below have been modified to reflect a 200-day school year in Alberta compared to a 180-day school year in the United States. Examples given are typical schedules; there are almost as many variations as there are schools on a year-round calendar. Each district chooses or modifies the calendar to suit their local needs. There are two basic models, single-track and multi-track.

Single-Track

A year round schedule in which the entire student enrollment has the same schedule of school days and vacation days. All the students are on the same track.

Year-Round Education - Typical Single Track Schedule



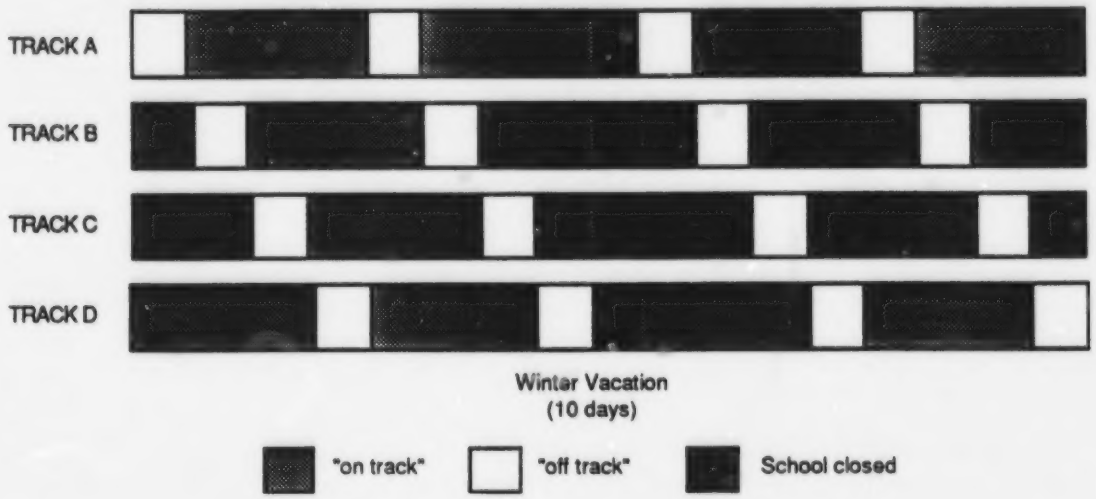
To change to a single-track year-round schedule is simply a calendar change. The summer holiday is shortened and the teachers would continue to go to school the same number of days as they do now. This system will work in any school anywhere in Alberta

Multi-Track

A year-round schedule in which the student enrollment is divided into groups, usually four. At any one time, one group is "off-track" or on vacation. In calculating the number of days on- and off-track, the following general equation applies:

No. of Tracks minus 1 X No. of Days Off-Track = No. of Days On-Track

Year Round Education - Typical Multi-Track Schedule



It should be noted that to arrange this schedule to match the requirement for 950 hours of instruction for elementary and junior high schools may require changes in the number of minutes of instruction offered each day.

Calendar Variations Used Within Single and Multi-Track Schedules

The first three of these examples are from the United States, where the length of the school year is 180 days compared to between 190 and 200 in Alberta.

45/15

A schedule providing 45 days of school instruction followed by 15 days of vacation time, repeated continuously throughout the year. The student enrollment can be divided into groups (called "tracks"), each with a separate schedule of school days (called "multi-track"), or all of the student enrollment can be assigned to the same schedule of school days (called "single-track").

60/20

A schedule providing 60 days of school instruction followed by 20 days of vacation time repeated continuously throughout the year. Again, the schedule can be either single-track or multi-track and can be modified for Alberta by changing the number of minutes of instruction offered each day.

90/30

A schedule providing 90 days of school instruction followed by 30 days of vacation time, repeated two times during the school year. The schedule could be modified for Alberta by adding extra days instruction and subtracting vacation time, or by changing the number of minutes of instruction offered each day.

Quarter System

A schedule providing four instructional periods of approximately 13 weeks during the fall, winter, spring and summer. The student enrollment can be divided into four groups each attending three of the four "quarters" (multi-track) or all of the students can be assigned to the same four instructional periods (single-track).

Quinmester or Five-Term System

A schedule providing five instructional periods of approximately 10 weeks during the school year. The student enrollment can be divided into five groups each attending four of the five instructional periods (multi-track) or all of the students can be assigned the the same four instructional periods (single track) with the fifth period being vacation.

Continuous School Year

Any plan for school operation in which the school plant is used during the entire year. This is another term for year-round schooling.

If my school is going to YRE, which of these schedules should my school adopt?

The major reason that school boards in the United States have adopted YRE is space saving. If overcrowding is not a problem then the school could adopt either a single-track or multi-track schedule, whichever is most suitable for the community. Some schools adopt YRE for educational reasons rather than for space reasons. If a school is considering YRE for space reasons, because the school is overcrowded or about to become so, then multi-track schedules allow space saving because a portion of the student enrollment is always on vacation. A four-track schedule frees one third of the available space. In other words, a four-track school built to house 750 can accommodate 1000 students because 250 are on vacation at any one time.

Experience in the United States seems to indicate that shorter instructional periods (as in the 45/15 schedule) seem to work best in elementary schools and longer instructional periods (as in 90/30) seem to work best in high schools.

Multitrack YRE works best when the school has an enrollment in excess of 600 students. In schools with lower enrollments, multi-tracking may require split grades or some grades only being on certain tracks. Each track can be considered as a "school-within-a-school" and each track normally requires the full range of services that are available to the school as a whole. Single-tracking works in any school – so long as space is not the reason for implementing YRE.

If we decide not to go to YRE and my community is experiencing growth with the school becoming crowded, what are other alternatives?

It depends on the size of the community and the school but generally there are four alternatives:

1. Build a new school - This is the traditional method of dealing with the situation. However, the capital cost of school construction continues to increase and the province is unable to meet all of the demands for new schools. In 1989/90 there were $350 million worth of requests and the

province was able to provide $85 million. Current allocations are $140 million per year. (1991)

2. Rezoning - In most metropolitan areas older sections of the communities have lost student population, but at the same time still have school buildings which are structurally sound.

   By rezoning and drawing students out of some other area of the community which has an excess of students, these facilities can be continued in use. This option is feasible only where there is available school space. Generally, this option is not popular with parents who prefer their children to go to school close to where they live.

3. Busing - Busing is another form of rezoning. By transporting students who live in one area of the district to an area that has unused space, a district is able to utilize its classroom space in a more efficient manner. Again, this option is not generally popular with parents.

4. Double shifts - This option has half of the student enrollment attending in the morning and half in the afternoon. As a temporary measure this may be acceptable but parents are not usually in favour of this option as a long-term solution to space problems.

What does the School Act say? Is Year-Round Education permitted?

The following sections of the Alberta School Act apply:

"**40**(1) A board shall specify the following:

(a) the school opening date;

(b) the number and the days of school operation;

(c) the length of the school day;

(d) the number of minutes of school operation in a school day;

(e) the number and length of recesses;

(f) subject to section 25*, the number of minutes of classroom instruction.

(2) A board shall specify the vacation periods in a school year, which shall include

(a) a winter vacation that extends at least from December 24 to January 2, and

(b) the opportunity for each student to take at least 1 school vacation of at least 4 consecutive weeks' duration in each calendar year. . . .

(5) A board shall, before May 31 in each year, give notice to the Minister of

(a) the opening and closing dates of all schools under its jurisdiction for the 12-month period next following, and

(b) the dates of vacation periods in the school year. . . .'

*Section **25** permits the Minister to prescribe courses of study, including the amount of instruction time. At the elementary and junior-high school levels, where attendance at school is compulsory, a minimum of 950 hours of instruction is required in each school year. At the high-school level, while there are no set hours of instruction that the school must offer, the credit requirements for the various high school diplomas, and therefore for the hours of instruction required, are determined by the courses the school offers and the students elect to take.

With regard to **teaching days and teachers**, the School Act (1989) says:

"**78**(1) In this Division, "teaching day" means

(a) a day on which instruction is given by a teacher,

(b) a day on which a school is closed due to an emergency,

(c) a day on which a school is closed by order of the Minister,

(d) 2 days on which a teachers' convention authorized by the Alberta Teachers' Association is held,

(e) holidays declared by the board, and

(f) any other days that are approved by the Minister.

(2) Unless a teacher agrees, a board may not require a teacher to instruct students

(a) for more than 330 minutes during a teaching day, or

(b) for less than 190 or more than 200 teaching days in a school year. . . ."

To summarize, legislation, regulation and policy regarding education in Alberta is flexible enough to permit year-round education within broad parameters established by the province and further policies established by local school boards.

When will my children be on holiday? There's nothing for them to do in the middle of winter and we can't afford to take holidays then?

First, it should be noted that the diagrams given earlier are only examples of possibilities and the calendars can be adjusted so that parents get holiday time for their children at times that are most suited to them.

Many parents do not want their children to have a a three or four week holiday in the winter but, on the other hand, many other parents do. A multi-track calendar gives parents more choice in holiday times than does the traditional calendar. For example, parents who want a calendar closest to the traditional calendar would choose track A or track D in the example, parents who want holidays spread more evenly would choose track B or C, parents who wanted a longer holiday around Christmas time would choose track A or D, and so on. Year-round calendars give greater choice of holiday times - in May or October for example. Holidays don't

have to be in the middle of winter in year-round calendars. A traditional calendar, however, only gives one choice for all and not all are happy with that choice.

The setting of school calendars and the times when schools will be open and closed is a local school board responsibility. If the majority of parents are not in favour of a change then the local board is not likely to make the change.

Are there periods in YRE schools where there is a common vacation period for students and teachers?

Yes, in almost all plans all schools are closed for the traditional Christmas vacation period and some plans allow for the school to be closed for a four week period during the summer. As mentioned earlier, legislation in Alberta requires that there be a winter vacation that extends at least from December 24 to January 2, and the opportunity for each student to take 1 school vacation of at least 4 consecutive weeks duration in each calendar year.

Do students and teachers still receive the statutory holidays?

Yes.

Do the children in elementary school continue to have the same teacher for all or most of the time?

Generally speaking, the answer is yes. Each class and teacher are self-contained and when a class goes out on vacation, the teacher goes on the same vacation.

Do the teachers and children continue to have the same room?

In a single-track school, yes. In a multi-track school, for example a four-track school, four sections of students are assigned to three classrooms. Thus, when the teacher and student return from a 15-day vacation period, they will be in a different classroom. Each classroom is assigned a basic set of materials, textbooks, etc. These materials stay in the room and the personal items of students and teachers are placed in storage, usually in tote trays in locked cabinets, while they are on

vacation. The chart on the next page, courtesy Oxnard School District, Oxnard, California, illustrates how 4 teachers might share 3 classrooms.

What is an "Intersession" and what happens during that time?

An intersession is the time when students are off-track or on vacation. In some systems that time is simply vacation. In other systems the intersession time may be used for remedial activities, enrichment activities, recreational type activities or other activities typically found during summer in traditional calendar schools, e.g. Bible camps, computer camps and so on.

How are students assigned to tracks in multi-track schools?

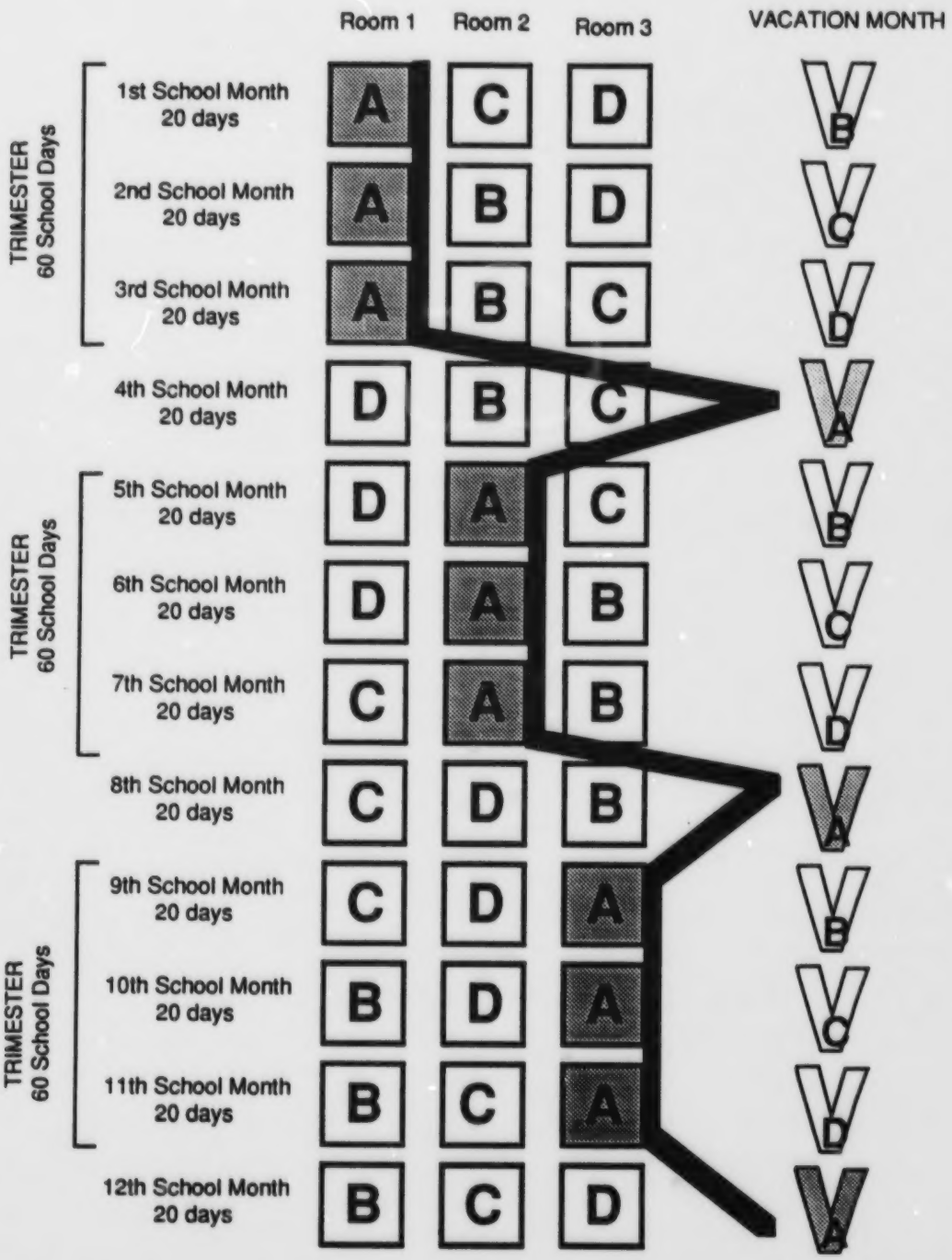
Usually parents are asked to select first, second and third choices of tracks and every effort is made to honour first choices. If parents wish, they are able to select tracks so that all their children and/or their friends are on vacation at the same time. However, some parents prefer to have older and younger children on vacation at different times. Usually an appeal mechanism is established to allow parents to appeal a track placement for compelling reasons why their children should be on different tracks than those assigned. Sometimes the school may assign children to certain tracks to split up troublesome groups of children but parental choice is the first criteria used in track placement.

How are teachers assigned to tracks in multi-track schools?

Most schools try to honour teacher preferences as much as possible. It is essential to have teachers evenly distributed across the tracks, however, so everyone may not always get his or her first choice. Teachers who are also parents are usually allowed to choose tracks for themselves and their children that are the same so that they are both on vacation at the same time.

3 CLASSROOMS HOUSING 4 CLASSES

60-20 Year-Round Education Plan: An illustration showing how a YRE School can add more students to a school building than would be possible in a traditional (September-June) calendar



Do families moving into the school area have a choice of tracks?

As much as possible, but the school has to ensure that each child is able to get the required number of days of instructional time. Therefore, students are often placed by the school on the track that is consistent with the number of days that the student has already attended school that year.

If the elementary school is on YRE but the Junior and Senior High Schools are not, how does this affect families with children at various grade levels?

While there may be times when the elementary school children are on vacation at the same time as the older children are in school, a Christmas vacation and a one month summer vacation can be common to all. Some parents prefer this system that still allows family vacations, but also allows time to do special things separately with the different aged children who have different interests.

What about students in Special Education programs?

Usually special education services are offered on all tracks - the students are treated no differently than others for track assignment purposes. The exceptional child's retention factor has always been a matter of deep concern and teachers often repeat the old phrase, "he forgot everything I taught him" when the child returns to the traditional school in September. If a year-round schedule is adopted, the learning process is renewed after a short break and the exceptional child has a better chance of retaining material after this shorter period. As mentioned earlier, intersessions may be used for remedial activities.

What is the effect of YRE on the instructional program?

What is taught and how it is taught are not influenced by the school year calendar. The same number of days are scheduled for instruction on both the modified and traditional school year calendars. In just the same way that a teacher would not begin a new unit of work two days before the summer holidays, a teacher does not begin a new unit just before the students are going off-track. Less time is usually

needed for review because students have been away from school for shorter periods of time, therefore more time can be spent on new instructional material.

What effect does YRE have on report cards and parent teacher interviews?

None, report cards and parent-teacher interviews are scheduled at appropriate times throughout the year.

What effect does YRE have on recreational activities outside of normal school hours?

The year-round school requires a greater degree of cooperation with recreation departments. However, in multi-track situations there are not large numbers of students demanding recreation programs in the summer, recreation programs can be scheduled throughout the year to meet the needs of the off-track students. Recreation departments have often expressed a preference for this arrangement as they can provide recreation to suit the seasons as well as spreading their staffing requirements throughout the year.

Will the year-round school cost more to operate?

The per-student instructional costs to the district should remain approximately the same since the students receive the same number of days of instruction on a year-round schedule as they would on a traditional calendar. If the district decides to offer an intersession program, then that is usually an additional cost. Sometimes small charges are made for intersession programs to cover the costs. Other cost factors are discussed later.

Will the year-round school require more teachers?

No. If the district pupil teacher ratio is maintained, then the number of teachers employed will not change.

Will YRE eliminate the need for new school buildings?

It depends. If year-round education is adopted as a district-wide, long-term program, then a major building program generally would not be necessary for the foreseeable future. However, it may be viewed as a temporary measure to "buy time" until new construction is completed. Many schools went to year round education because of crowding problems but later, when the crowding problem disappeared because people moved away for employment reasons, the school district elected to remain with YRE because of the educational advantages. On the other hand, some school districts reverted to traditional calendars.

Will the schools need to be air-conditioned if they are going to operate in the summer?

In some cases, yes. If the school is in a part of the province that has very hot summers (and not many are!), or where no windows can be opened, then air conditioning may be necessary. However, in single-track YRE schools there are offsetting savings in heating costs in the winter. With cool nights in Alberta, air-conditioning units would only have to operate to reduce temperatures in the later parts of the school day and be inoperative during the nighttime. Some jurisdictions have reported maximum increase in power costs of 5% per year.

Will YRE in multi-track schools increase costs of maintenance and operations of school buildings?

Yes. Year-round operation will cost more in additional personnel for coverage of custodial vacations, more power and water usage, some fuel cost for domestic hot water. More use means more wear, and therefore, some additional maintenance costs. These costs can be more than offset because fewer buildings are needed and maintenance is not required for nonexistent buildings. Single-track schools are not affected.

How will it be possible to keep the schools clean on a year-round basis compared to a regular school year where major repairs and deep cleaning are accomplished in the summer?

Equivalent housekeeping during the year can be maintained, but additional personnel may be needed and scheduling of maintenance and repair will be needed. Some cleaning will have to shift to night work. A year-round school can be compared to a hospital with regard to cleaning and maintenance. Hospitals are open 365 days a year for 24 hours a day but they are still the cleanest buildings in the community.

Won't Day Care be a problem?

Before trying YRE many parents identify day-care, pre-school care and after-school care as potentially the biggest problems. Communities that have tried YRE report no major problems. In fact, they often report improvements in the situation. Day care providers adjust to the new schedule and are able to provide a quality service throughout the year without having to provide for a sudden glut of demand in the summer. Parents often report that it's easier to get a baby-sitter for a three week period than it is for a two month period.

Won't part-time jobs be difficult for high school students to get?

Again, that doesn't seem to be the case. In fact, some employers have said that there are advantages in having a steady supply of part-time labour throughout the year rather than having all students compete for a limited number of jobs during two months in the summer.

Will there need to additional diploma examination sittings?

Not necessarily. YRE calendars can be scheduled so that all grade twelve students finish their courses at the same time as in traditional calendars. Students can choose tracks that best match their learning styles, i.e. to give themselves either a holiday or time in school for review just before exams.

If it's so good, why haven't we changed sooner?

Someone once remarked that changing education is like moving a cemetery – you do it one body at a time. The basic reason is that change is always difficult; it's easier to continue in the old way than it is to change. The original school calendar was designed around an agrarian lifestyle that is no longer the case in many communities. Educators have a hard time defending the traditional calendar on educational grounds, but to change from something that has been the practice for many years requires significant shifts in attitudes.

Other than for space reasons, the other reasons for adopting this approach are not always compelling enough to make the change.

Please summarize the argument in favour of Year-Round Education.

It should be noted that these are common arguments in favour of YRE and should not be interpreted as research findings.

Educational

1. Achievement scores are reported to be up in some districts in the U.S. using year-round calendars, but more evidence is needed before definitive statements can be be made. While the gains are not large in the higher ability groups of students, some gains have been shown in those students of lower ability. No evidence exists to show that any student has suffered educationally by year-round education. It should be remembered that if all one does is change the calendar than a large change in student achievement is not likely. In districts with a strong intersession program, gains are even larger – but that is only to be expected as these students are receiving additional instruction.

   Parents, students and teachers all report that they feel that the students are learning more, but there's a lack of hard evidence to support these perceptions.

2. Summer learning loss may be reduced.

3. Students are in a more continuous learning mode. It is believed that there is a natural learning progression for example with 9 weeks of school followed by a break for three weeks without long summer breaks. Foreign languages are easier to learn because of the more continual practice. Gifted and talented students could be more continually challenged. Remedial students are reported to have better retention and decreased need for tutors.

4. Attendance by both teachers and students is reported to be better. There are no more long boring holidays or long periods in school without a holiday. Students and teachers both report increased morale and better attitudes. Teachers and students report being ready for a fresh start after a short break.

5. There are more opportunities for remediation and enrichment.

6. YRE can be designed to fit the needs of the local community.

7. YRE encourages individualization of instruction.

8. Existing educational programs can be used with little modification.

9. The drop-out rate at the secondary level is reportedly reduced.

10. More school-based planning and teacher involvement is encouraged.

11. The learning environment tends to be more stable.

12. Lengthy illness or vacations can be adjusted for in the calendar of an individual student by having him jump tracks as appropriate. Doctors and dentists have noted that YRE helps with scheduling appointments for children when they are off-track.

13. Less time is spent on review.

14. Money saved by not building and operating new schools can be diverted to instruction.

15. Fewer behaviour problems have been noted.

16. Teachers can substitute in the school during their off-track time. In this way the school gets substitutes who are highly trained, know the students, and know the school. The teacher has the opportunity to earn more.

Economic

1. Space can be saved in multi-track YRE. (Up to a 50% gain)

2. Money can be saved in the areas of capital expenditure, debt reduction, and fixed operational costs.

3. Vandalism is reduced because someone is in the school more days in the year to keep an eye on things.

4. Building are used more days in the year, reducing the need for other buildings and increasing the public perception that tax dollars are being spent wisely. Business people often comment that they could not shut down their business for two months in the summer, why should schools?

5. Many districts have reported savings in operational budgets after the first year.

Cultural

1. Family vacations are spread out and can be taken at less busy and less expensive times of the year when it suits the parents. Employers prefer YRE because their employees are taking vacations throughout the year rather than all of them wanting vacations in July and August.

2. Work for students is available all year round. There is less competition for jobs in the summer.

3. The concepts of neighborhood schools and community schools are preserved.

4. Student, teacher, and parent perceptions and attitudes seem to be positive.

What arguments are there against YRE?

1. There may be increased operational costs for air-conditioning.

2. There is a lack of "hard data" evidence of achievement gain.

3. Balancing the number of students on each track can be difficult if parents first choice is to be maintained.

4. More planning, coordination and record keeping is required at the school level.

5. There is an increase in administration time. Principals contracts of employment may need to be extended and enriched. Secretaries also have increased work loads and may need 12 month contracts instead of 10 month contracts.

6. Principals report a lack of opportunity to work with the staff as a whole.

7. Communication with off-track students can be a problem.

8. Scheduling can be difficult, particularly at the secondary level.

9. There can be conflicts with traditional schedules in other schools over such things as bussing, athletics and other activities.

10. Some teachers are opposed to having to move classrooms.

11. Some families report conflicts with their family lifestyle. They like a really long summer break.

12. Some conflicts can occur with summer recreation and camp activities.

13. Child Care may be a problem for those parents who rely on high school students if those students are not on the same schedule. Usually, where all schools are on YRE, children from the same family are usually guaranteed the same track.

14. Teachers find it difficult to work on advanced degrees during the summer unless universities change their course schedules.

In summary?

More study and discussion is need with all those concerned before a school district should adopt this approach. School districts might like to explore the concept further, perhaps on a pilot basis, and perhaps in collaboration with educational researchers. Alberta Education is willing to help where possible.

Reference

Glines, D.: *Year Round Education: A Philosophy* in Thrust, May/June 1987